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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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March 7, 1975

Dear Mr. Hamilton:

I am pleased to respond to your letter of February 15 addressed to Secretary Vance under cover of which you forwarded a memorandum prepared by the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee.

The referenced memorandum raised points relative to the proposed sale of F-5 aircraft to Egypt. Under cover of this letter, I am forwarding the Department's response to the memorandum.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

Enclosures:
1. Correspondence returned,
2. Comments on AIPAC's Memorandum.

The Honorable
Lee H. Hamilton, Chairman,
Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East,
Committee on International Relations,
House of Representatives.

Comments on AIPAC's Memorandum re Proposed Sale of F-5 Aircraft to Egypt

Response to a Request of Congressman Hamilton, Chairman, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, Committee on International Relations

THE AIRCRAFT

AIPAC Memorandum

"The F-5E is an offensive, not defensive, weapon..."

Department of State Comments

Most modern fighter aircraft have both an offensive and a defensive capability. However, the design of a specific aircraft generally is dictated by its primary mission; the F-5 to be sold to Egypt has primarily a defensive role. These aircraft will not have an in-flight refueling capability, nor will they be configured to accept guided munitions such as "Maverick". Armed with two 20mm cannons and two AIM-9J ("Sidewinder") fair weather air-to-air missiles, the aircraft will be optimally suited for an air defense role. The plane's limited range, fire control system, maneuvering capabilities, and short-range radar are all designed for optimal use in close-in air-to-air combat. When configured to carry an external load of "iron bombs", the basic air-to-ground ordnance which could be used by this aircraft, performance capabilities are reduced. With a maximum load, combat radius would be limited to approximately 255 nautical miles, the aircraft could not be flown supersonically, and its maneuverability would be severely restricted.

Operating as an air defense interceptor, the F-5 is less capable in terms of speed, radar detection ranges, and variety of air-to-air munitions than the fighter aircraft in the inventories of several of Egypt's neighbors. However, when operating in a ground-controlled-intercept mode--i.e., essentially when operating in Egyptian airspace--this plane has a good capability against intruders loaded with bombs. Without external radar control, the F-5 is a fair weather, daytime fighter; it carries no all-weather missiles and has limited radar detection range.

The implication that the F-5 is the equal of the F-14 and F-15 in air combat is misleading. Both of the latter have vastly superior radar detection capabilities and all-weather missiles with ranges greatly in excess of counterpart capabilities of the F-5. Furthermore, both the F-14 and F-15 have a marked speed advantage over the F-5 and therefore could either overtake or evade the latter. Should an F-14 or F-15 become engaged in a close-in "dog fight" with the F-5, the odds of defeating the F-5 would be reduced but still strongly in favor of the more modern aircraft. Either of the more advanced aircraft would be able to take advantage of its inbuilt speed.

The statement that "...the F-5E would be able to get through the Israeli ground and air defenses and cause considerable damage..." disregards the capabilities of the Israeli air defense network, the F-5 mission profile, and the combat ability of Israeli pilots--among the most proficient in the world.

EGYPTIAN MILITARY STRENGTH

AIPAC Memorandum

"...Egypt received extensive resupply of weapons from the Soviet Union following the 1973 war which continued through 1977..."

Department of State Comments

It is impossible to reconcile the data attributed to the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) and our best information concerning Soviet resupply of Egypt. We do not know if the IISS included equipment received immediately prior to or during the war; nor do we know whether the term "Soviet" includes resupply from other Warsaw Pact countries.

The Egyptian Government has acknowledged that a military supply relationship existed with the Soviet Union for some time following the October 1973 war. Based on our evaluation of all information available to us, we have concluded that virtually no new Soviet equipment has arrived in Egypt since mid-1975, although there have been a few deliveries of items being returned from the USSR after refurbishing.

IISS data included by AIPAC were compared with other information available to our government. We found a general discrepancy in that the IISS report shows higher Egyptian equipment inventories than we believe to be the case. For example, the AIPAC tabulation shows that Egypt received 400 T-54/55 medium battle tanks; USG sources indicate they received none during the post-October 1973 period. AIPAC contends that Egypt has received six times as many APC's as the USG believes likely, and more than three times the number of artillery pieces. Conversely, we believe that the Egyptians received two more MIG-23's than shown by AIPAC. The U.S. sold Egypt six C-130 aircraft (AIPAC shows four), but no EC-130H (sic) aircraft. Our best information indicates that no MIG-27 aircraft have been deployed outside the Warsaw Pact countries.

AIPAC Memorandum

"...his (Sadat's) armed forces are fully equipped with spare parts and dispose of sufficient supplies to wage an allout war for three to four weeks..."

Department of State Comment

Despite substantial reequipment of the Egyptian armed forces in the two years after the October 1973 war, Egyptian inventories are still not up to pre-war levels. The army is in relatively better shape than the air force, although not all armored vehicles have been replaced. The air force's inventory is about 20 percent below its 1973 peak, and Egyptian air defense capabilities are well below 1973 levels.

High intensity combat operations reminiscent of those experienced in previous rounds of Arab-Israeli fighting quickly would deplete Egyptian stockpiles and severely strain logistics and maintenance systems. Knowledgeable observers frequently have reported that the material condition of Egyptian mechanized equipment is very poor, with a high level of inoperative military vehicles of all kinds. To stretch their supply of spare parts, the Egyptian armed forces have altered training practices to reduce wear and tear on equipment during maneuvers, have extended the periods between major overhauls of equipment, have resorted to extensive "cannibalization" to keep parts of equipment inventories operating, and otherwise have accepted implicit degradation of their combat capabilities. The flying rate within the air force has been severely curtailed.

AIPAC Memorandum

"...Egypt has a multitude of suppliers from which to choose, while Israel can only look to the United States for advanced military equipment..."

Department of State Comment

The assertion that Israel can look only to the United States for advanced military equipment is largely true. Nonetheless, some sales have been made, i.e., the 1974 Israeli purchase of three British submarines (these were delivered in 1977).

Subsequent to the Soviet-imposed embargo of shipments on military equipment to Egypt, the Sadat government has sought alternate sources of supply, principally in Western Europe. Unlike Israel, Egypt does not possess an indigenous armaments industry capable of producing sophisticated fighter aircraft. The Israeli-manufactured "Kfir" fighter is superior to the F-5 in terms of speed, range and payload capabilities.

Public sources reveal that the Government of Egypt recently has signed contracts with British firms for helicopters, antitank missiles, and perhaps fast patrol boats. Although there have been extended negotiations between France and Egypt relative to the purchase of Mirage F-1 aircraft, contracts have not been concluded in this regard. Furthermore, we are informed that there are no plans at present for Egyptian purchase of this plane. The Egyptian government's interest in purchasing military items from Italy, Spain, various Warsaw Pact nations, China and West Germany has met with only limited success.

AIPAC Memorandum

"The People's Republic of China has reportedly supplied Egypt with at least 30 engines for its MIG-21's."

Department of State Comment

The engines supplied by China were for Egypt's older MIG-17 aircraft.

REWARDING EGYPT

AIPAC Memorandum

"...the U.S. has sold Egypt...12 Firebee Aerial Reconnaissance Drones...and trucks and jeeps costing approximately $350 million. In September 1977 the Administration agreed to provide Egypt with U.S. technology, expertise and licenses for the refurbishing of 200 Egyptian MIG-21 jets..."

Department of State Comments

Although the Administration in October 1977 informed the Egyptian Government of our willingness to approve of the sale of aerial reconnaissance drones, the Egyptians have not yet made a decision on this matter. The statement that the U.S. has sold approximately $350 million worth of trucks and jeeps to Egypt presumably refers to a commercial arrangement for assembly of American Motors (AMC) civilian vehicles; in addition to their civilian uses, such vehicles could be used by the military, and the Egyptian armed forces do use some of these jeeps. The Sadat government requested USG assistance in developing a program designed to arrest deterioration of Egypt's MIG-21 fleet. We sought to be responsive by sanctioning participation by General Electric and Lockheed in developing such a program in conjunction with firms in third countries. We understand that the Egyptian Government has decided not to accept the proposals put forward by the consortia of which the American firms were a part. Consequently, the question of State Department approval of required licenses for technical services contracts has not arisen.

AIPAC Memorandum

"...Egypt has received more than $4 billion in (U.S.) aid since the Yom Kippur War."

State Department Comment

In fiscal years 1974-1977 (i.e., since the Yom Kippur war), the USG has extended to Egypt approximately $2.3 billion in economic assistance. During fiscal year 1978, the figure will be $950 million. The total through the current fiscal year will be approximately $3.2 billion in commitments, including PL-480 programs. Disbursements to date have been substantially lower, since major amounts of this aid are for project assistance with long lead times.

WHO THREATENS EGYPT?

AIPAC Memorandum

"...Egypt has no genuine military need for the F-5E's ...Last year's hostilities between Egypt and Libya indicate clearly Egypt's ability to deal effectively with its unpredictable western neighbor...It is to be expected that much of Libya's vast arms arsenal would be placed at Egypt's disposal (in event of another Arab-Israeli war)..."

Department of State Comments

Egypt's security is affected directly by events in nearby African countries. Libyan and/or Soviet supported threats to friendly regimes are of particular concern. Current developments in the Chad are illustrative. Because the Egyptian economy is intrinsically dependent on the unimpeded flow of the Nile waters, any Egyptian government must be particularly sensitive to developments in coriparian states--an important factor in Egypt's present concern with the situation in the Horn.

The 1977 hostilities with Libya served to point up the continuing need for maintenance of a credible Egyptian military force. The fighting with Libya was too short in duration for observers to draw any firm conclusions; this was especially the case since Libya did not commit a large part of its armed forces to combat. It is also to be noted that Libya continues to increase its force levels.

It is true that several of the Arab states not adjacent to Israel nominally committed forces to assist Egypt during the October 1973 war. However, none of these forces arrived in time to be effectively used in combat (even though that war was longer than the two previous military conflicts between Israel and her Arab neighbors). Given the long-standing differences between Libya and Egypt, it is questionable that Libyan forces or equipment would be put at Egypt's disposal in time of war. Any transfer prior to an outbreak of hostilities would provide Israel with significant advance warning.

THE SALE IS CONTRARY TO U.S. INTEREST

AIPAC Memorandum

"...The sale of F-5E fighter bombers to Egypt contradicts established U.S. policies on regional balance...

President Sadat's vulnerable position within the Arab world as well as his weak health are constant reminders of the unstable leadership and patterns of succession in Egypt..."

Department of State Comments

The proposed sale of 50 F-5E's to Egypt will not alter the basic military balance in the region. There is a consensus among military and intelligence analysts that the Israeli military capability will remain superior to that not only of Egypt but of the combined potential Arab forces for an indefinite period of time.

Although President Sadat has had some health problems, he has shown himself capable of leading his country through a difficult and prolonged period. Sadat has been in power since September 1970. Since 1952, Egypt has had only two presidents--a pattern of remarkable longevity in terms of leadership. The succession by Sadat following Nasser's death took place smoothly. President Sadat's present term of office expires in 1982.